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ABSTRACT

Simulation gaming is an instructional technique, uniquely suited to enhance the repertoire of the social studies teacher. As its name suggests, simulation is anything that recreates reality. A game, on the other hand, is an activity in which (1) participants agree to abide by a set of expectations in order to create an experience and (2) inefficient means of reaching goals are frequently incorporated into the rules. Thus, participants in a simulation game are thrust into an environment that is governed by rules and operates in a manner similar to the way in which the real world operates. As a way of individualizing instruction, simulation gaming offers an exciting alternative for social studies teachers: (1) During a simulation game learning is self-motivated, self-directing and self-rewarding; (2) Simulation gaming provides an environment that is capable of adapting itself to the needs of individual students; (3) By emphasizing the debriefing process, simulation gaming provides an opportunity for the experience of the game to be perceived and expressed in a variety of ways by a wide range of distinctively different people. (JD)

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Individualizing Social Studies through Simulation Gaming

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Individualizing Social Studies through Simulation Gaming

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Simulation gaming is an instructional technique, uniquely suited to enhance the repertoire of the social studies teacher. As its name suggests, simulation gaming is a hybrid which blends two distinct entities. Simulation is anything which recreates reality. A game, on the other hand, is an activity in which (1) participants agree to abide by a set of expectations in order to create an experience and (2) inefficient means of reaching goals are frequently incorporated into the rules. Thus, participants in a simulation game are thrust into an environment which is governed by rules and operates in a manner similar to the way in which the real world operates.

As a way of individualizing instruction, simulation gaming offers an exciting alternative for social studies teachers. (1) During a simulation game learning is self-motivated, self-directing and self-rewarding. (2) Simulation gaming provides an environment which is capable of adapting itself to the needs of individual students. (3) By emphasizing the debriefing process, simulation gaming provides an opportunity for the experience of the game to be perceived and expressed in a variety of ways by a wide range of distinctively different people.

Individualizing Social Studies through Simulation Gaming

Simulation gaming is an instructional technique, uniquely suited to enhance the repertoire of the social studies teacher. As its name suggests, simulation gaming is a hybrid which blends two distinct entities. Simulation is anything which recreates reality. A game, on the other hand, is an activity in which (1) participants agree to abide by a set of expectations in order to create an experience and (2) inefficient means of reaching goals are frequently incorporated into the rules (Suits, 1967). Thus, participants in a simulation game are thrust into an environment which is governed by rules and operates in a manner similar to the way in which the real world operates.

As a way of individualizing instruction, simulation gaming offers an exciting alternative for social studies teachers. (1) If individualization is defined as an attempt to structure the environment so that learning becomes self-motivated, self-directing and self-rewarding, then simulation gaming has great potential. (2) If individualization is defined as an attempt to create a responsive arena capable of adapting itself to meet individual needs, then simulation gaming performs remarkably well. (3) If individualization is defined as a process which encourages the formulation and expression of divergent perceptions, then simulation gaming should head the list of every social studies teacher.

Self-Motivating and Self-Rewarding

Outside the classroom, students learn by searching out their own questions and needs. In the real world learning is enhanced because feedback is swift and peculiarly shaped to correspond with each person's behavior (Bruner, 1971). In the real world, the consequences of one's behavior are experienced by each individual as he or she reaches out to grapple with the environment. In the real world, learning is self-motivated, self-directed and self-rewarding. In short, learning is individualized.

Simulation gaming transports the process of individualized learning from the real world into the classroom. This metamorphosis is accomplished by abstracting from life some elements of social relations or social organization and attempting to reconstruct the principal rules by which behavior in a particular arena is governed and the principal rewards that it holds for participants (Coleman, 1966). Thus, participants are thrust into an arena in which they can explore hunches, receive feedback on the consequences of actions and judge the utility of any strategy by noting their progress. In a very real sense the world outside the classroom is recreated for students so that individualized learning is allowed to happen.

If, for example, a teacher wishes to introduce students to the concept of democracy, the usual choice is a telling format reinforced by textbook reading. The teacher who wishes to allow individualized learning to occur might, instead, begin with Game I: Legislative Session, which is one of eight games housed within the game of

Democracy (Coleman, 1966).

By involving students in the kinds of actions that real legislators engage in, the teacher structures an environment in which players discover for themselves that they, as legislators, must satisfy the desires or interests of their constituents, at least to some extent, if they wish to remain in office. Instead of reading about an abstract principle, students enter a simulated arena in which the principle is in operation. Instead of receiving the artificial reward of a grade, each player's score depends solely on whether the legislature passes or defeats those issues in which his or her constituents are interested. Thus, the reward system flows from the rules upon which the real world system is based. Once the first game of Democracy is mastered, students may play several of the other games within the set in order to more fully understand the complexity of decision-making in a democracy.

The social studies teacher in a middle-class suburban community who wants his or her students to experience the frustration of ghetto life might use the simulation game of Ghetto (Toll, 1969). Instead of being given isolated statistics on inner-city life, students are immediately plunged into a life of hustling, welfare and violence; they become people who live in a ghetto and struggle to survive.

Roles are assigned by distributing descriptive profiles to players. Liza, for example, is 35, has five children under 13, is separated and has completed the eighth grade. Juan, on the other hand, is 24, has three children under six, is married and has completed the tenth grade. Even by contrasting two of the ten roles, it is

apparent that, for Liza, the ghetto is harsher in reality than it is for Juan.

Within the constraints of their assigned roles and the randomness introduced by dice, chance cards and victim cards, players work out their strategies for survival. Within the simulated environment of a ghetto, players receive feedback which is directly linked to their own actions as they attempt to cope and survive in a hostile world. Slowly, each at their own pace of awareness, understanding and assimilation, players begin to piece together the conditions which cause crime, encourage welfare and invite hopelessness.

In the area of values and decision-making, there are many excellent strategies from which social studies teachers may choose, particularly those of Simon, Howe and Kirschenbaum (1972). If, however, a teacher wants to have his or her students experience the subtle consequences of their actions in relationship to their own personal beliefs, then the teacher might use the game of Decisions (Easterly, 1976).

Prior to the game each student is given a set of eight value cards from which to formulate goals. This is accomplished by rank ordering the value cards and then assigning points to each of the values as an indication of their relative importance to each other.

Decisions provides a simulated arena in which players buy, sell and trade in order to achieve personal goals. After each of the four rounds, players are confronted with four problem situations. Accompanying each situation are two alternative solutions, each of

which are linked with one of the eight values in the game.

When players have completed each of the four decisions, they experience the consequences of their decisions. If, for example, a player chooses to study hard for a test rather than stay up late to watch television, then he or she is given a green buck. Although green bucks always buy "Achieving or Winning" cards, many players do not see any relationship between decisions made and those values which form the basis for decisions. The crux of the game, then, is the fact that the consequences of decisions in the form of color coded "bucks," constitute the subtle accounting system for values chosen. Thus, the student who gives a top ranking to achieving or winning prior to the game will experience success during the game if he or she continues to choose alternative solutions whose underlying value is achieving or winning. Conversely, if this same student continually chooses alternatives linked to values other than achieving or winning, then he or she may end up in debt and/or unable to buy the value cards which are needed to achieve personal goals.

Throughout the game and especially during the debriefing, players attempt to solve the puzzle of the seemingly arbitrary relationship between decisions made and the color of bucks received. Thus, instead of being told that it is important to be consistent in what one says and does, players experience the frustration which occurs when such a gap exists. For some players, the gap is larger than others. As a result, their frustration is greater in degree, when compared with others whose beliefs and actions are more consistent.

Democracy, Ghetto and Decisions allow students to experience the consequences of their actions in much the same way as they would in the real world. In this way, the self-motivated, self-directing and self-rewarding process of learning which exists in the real world can be transplanted to the classroom where it can allow learning to flourish.

Meeting Individual Needs

A second kind of definition for individualized learning is based on a concern that the learning environment will be appropriate for each individual student. In this regard, simulation gaming has much to give.

Inbar and Stoll (1972) suggest that simulation games would be especially valuable for the under-achiever, the nonverbal or the cognitively-deprived student. Based upon his own research, Abt (1968) points out that simulation games can accommodate a broad spectrum of student ages and achievement levels. For example, students whose reading levels range from fourth grade through ninth have successfully played the same game.

Gordon (1972) suggests that in every class there are a chosen few who are expected to know the right answers and get the best grades. Simulation games offer fresh opportunities for "the others." As a direct result of playing simulation games, new classroom leaders with skills more closely linked to real-world decision-making may arise and be appreciated.

The simulated environments created by games await the touch of individual coping styles. They await the student who is passive, aggressive, shrewd, slow, or fast in response. Each will receive feedback from a responsive environment which respects and encourages the differences which players bring with them.

Divergent Perceptions

A third definition of individualized learning is linked with the tale of the Blind Men and the Elephant. For just as one blind man is sure he "sees" a snake, another is just as certain that he "sees" a tree.

A truly individualized learning environment allows for the individualization of experience within the game and the resulting expression and sharing of divergent perceptions after the game. Stadsklev (1974) suggests that among most gamers in the educational field, there appears to be a consensus that the real learning which comes from simulation games happens during the discussion and analysis following the game. During this process each student's perceptions about the game can be prompted by such questions from the teacher as: (1) How did you feel about the desires of your constituency? (2) What kind of a strategy did you use to survive in the ghetto? (3) What did you learn about decision-making that you could use tomorrow? (4) How would you change the game to make it better? (5) What would you change about the real world to make it better?

From the shared perceptions of many individuals comes the "gestalt" which "fills in" the total picture of the elephant. From the teacher's non-evaluative acceptance of each shared perception, students learn that it's all right to interpret experiences in different ways. They learn that it's not only all right but it's even "good," since the sharing of divergent responses enriches everyone, including the teacher.

Summary

In conclusion, three different ways of individualizing social studies through simulation gaming have been examined. (1) During a simulation game learning is self-motivated, self-directing and self-rewarding. (2) Simulation gaming provides an environment which is capable of adapting itself to the needs of individual students. (3) By emphasizing the debriefing process, simulation gaming provides an opportunity for the experience of the game to be perceived and expressed in a variety of ways by a wide range of distinctively different people.

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